

Why Christians Give Thanks

Thanksgiving Day – 11/26/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Luke 17:11-19 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ My dear Christian family, here we are on a day set aside to be filled with thanksgiving toward God for the many blessings that He showers upon us and yet we are worshipping on the internet instead of in-person.
 - ➔ On top of that our lives and our world are overflowing with stories of illness and death and conflict and stress; much of it because we are in the middle of a deadly pandemic; much of it because we live in a country with leaders and people who are deeply divided against each other.
 - ➔ So, what reasons can there be for us to dedicate this day to giving thanks when it actually seems more appropriate to gather in disgust and disappointment; in loneliness and even despair?
- ✘ You see, we have more in common with the ten lepers in our Gospel Reading today than we might have thought at first.
 - ➔ Try to imagine the scene Luke records for us in this text. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, passing between two regions that did not get along with each other – Samaria and Galilee. Verses 12-13 says, “And as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’”.

I. The Lepers had Great Reason to Give Thanks

- ✘ In those two verses, we see the gravity in their situation. You see, in their day, a diagnosis of leprosy was far worse than being diagnosed with Covid or even Cancer today. It was a certain death sentence. Having leprosy wasn’t cured by just taking a Tylenol and getting some rest. No, as the disease progresses it attacks the nerve endings. Pain turns to numbness. The skin loses its original color. It becomes thick, glossy, and scaly. Sores and ulcers develop especially around the eyes and ears so that the skin bunches up with deep furrows between the swelling, making one’s face look similar to that of a lion.
 - ➔ On top of that the leper’s voice becomes hoarse and grating. If you had signs of this disease you would be declared “unclean” and no longer allowed to live in your community – much worse than the quarantines we complain about today. Basically a leper was left homeless with no support of family or friends. To be a leper was considered to be cursed by God, profoundly impure. If anyone came near you, you were required to tear your clothes, cover your upper lip, and cry, “Unclean, unclean.”
- ✘ When Jesus told them in verse 14, “Go and show yourselves to the priests”, they had to do it, because it was the only Biblical way, in the rare cases of healing, that they could be declared clean. And they were. We’re told, “as they went they were cleansed”.
 - ➔ Only by the power of the Son of God those lepers were healed of that awful disease; freed from their death sentence.
- ✘ That’s why Luke tells us that they all turned back, praising God, with a loud voice, saying, “Thank you, thank you, thank you!”, right?

- Oh, wait. That isn't what happened. No, in fact, only one of the former lepers turned back to praise God and thank Jesus, and that person was a foreigner, a Samaritan, one of those who was regarded an outsider from the people of Israel; not a part of their covenant with God.
- Jesus even asked, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" (v.17).
- ✘ Even still all ten were cleansed. Their flesh was restored, to be like that of a youth – all of them. Now they could again participate in their community. They could have a house and home; they could be surrounded by their family and friends – all of them. Their lives had literally been saved – all of them!
- Yet, only this one returned back to Jesus to say, "Thank you" for His physical healing; to praise God for answering his prayer and showing him mercy. When it says in verse 16 that "he fell on his face at Jesus' feet" it is describing a humble and profound expression of worship. He knew this Jesus was God in the flesh. He knew this was His Creator and His Savior.

II. We have More Reasons to Give Thanks

- ✘ Well, dear Christians, even as you are gathered here in a very unconventional way on this national day of Thanksgiving, our living Lord through His Apostle Luke also asks us, "Where is the rest of your congregation, your Christian family today?" You see, even as you and I can't see them, the Lord knows who comes to Him in thanksgiving and worship here today and who does not.
- But were not all people cleansed by Christ's death and resurrection? Why then are not all giving thanks? And we know that many are not. Jesus even asks you and me who are here, "Has your heart always been filled with thanksgiving, love, and praise toward Me?"
- He continues to ask, consistent with the First Article of the Apostles' Creed, "Didn't I make you and all creatures? Didn't I give you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses? Don't I still take care of them? Haven't I given you clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all you have? Don't I richly and daily provide you with all you need to support your body and life? Don't I also defend you against all danger, guard and protect you from all evil?" (adapted from Luther's Small Catechism, the meaning of the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed.)
- And consistent to what we confess in the Second Article of the Creed, Jesus asks, "Haven't I redeemed you, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with My holy, precious blood and with My innocent suffering and death, that you may be My own and live under Me in My kingdom and serve Me in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as I'm risen from the dead, and live and reign to all eternity?" (adapted from Luther's Small Catechism, the meaning of the 2nd Article of the Apostles' Creed.)
- Still we're not done. As we have learned it in the Third Article of the Creed, Jesus wants you and me to consider, "Haven't I called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with My gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith; just as I call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth and keep it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith? In this Christian Church, won't I daily and richly forgive all your sins and the sins of all believers and raise you and all the dead, giving eternal life to you and all believers in Christ on the Last Day?" (adapted from Luther's Small Catechism, the meaning of the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed.)
- ✘ All of these things, my dear Christians, is why – even in the throes of pain and suffering; sorrow and despair you and I give thanks to God today. All of this is why we can truly relate to those

lepers of Jesus' day and even cry out with the same words, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (v. 13).

→ Because He does! He does grant us His mercy, even as we do not deserve it in the slightest because of our sin. Why?

→ Because our God is merciful, patient, and loving toward us every day in every way - even when we forget how much He truly gives us and what He has won and done for us.

⌘ Yes, all thanks be to God that Jesus, His Son, willingly went to that cursed tree; died for you and me and rose from death so that sin, death, and Satan – that evil trinity now have no power over us.

→ Thanks be to God that He continues to work in and prepare our hearts through the Word and Sacrament ministry of His Church so that angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven will be with us in our final home for all of eternity.

→ And yes, thanks be to God that Jesus had you and me in mind as well on that day in our text when he said, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well" (v. 19). Because praise God, we are saved today only and always because of Jesus!

Conclusion

⌘ Oh friends, we have so many reasons to give thanks today. And all of them come from Christ; so many reasons to say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you Jesus"; so many reasons to be just like the one leper who turned back to praise and worship Jesus with his face to the ground.

→ It's just like Abraham Lincoln said when he solidified a day of thanksgiving as a federal holiday during the Civil War in 1863. I've placed his declaration at the end of the Worship Materials for you to read when we are finished here.

⌘ You know, I think it's a pretty safe assumption that your parents taught you as a child, "Whenever you receive something say, 'Thank you'." We have received so much haven't we?

→ Yet, the ultimate reason we Christians give thanks, and we praise our living God is that He has accomplished our salvation. When you and I believe this to be the case with every ounce of our being, how can we confess anything else today except this: "Jesus truly is the Lord of my life"!

→ That dear Christians; that's why we give thanks, on this day and every day! In the life-saving name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.